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ADDRESS  
OF  
THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
OF THE  
MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL  
TO THE  
PUBLIC.

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As in some solitude, the summer rill  
Refreshes, where it winds, the faded green,  
And cheers the drooping flowers, unheard, unseen,  
Such is this charity!—no sudden start,  
After long sleep, of passion in the heart,  
But stedfast principle, and in its kind  
Of close alliance with the eternal mind.



BOSTON,

PRINTED BY J. BELCHER.

1814.

*At a meeting of the Trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital, on 2d of January, 1814.—Present the whole Board, viz.*

The Hon T. H. Perkins, Hon. Josiah Quincy, Hon. Daniel Sargent, Joseph May, Tristram Barnard, Stephen Higginson, jr. Gamaliel Bradford, George G. Lee, Francis C. Lowell, Joseph Tilden, John L. Sullivan, and Richard Sullivan, Esquires.

The Committee appointed on the 19th ult. to prepare an Address to the Public, on the necessity and importance of a General Hospital within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. made a Report, which having been read and considered, thereupon VOTED. That the further consideration of this Address be postponed until the next meeting, and that in the mean time the Hon. Messrs. Quincy and Sargent, and Col. G. G. Lee, be a Committee to communicate the said Address to the Board of Overseers of the Poor of the town of Boston, for its advice and consideration.

*At a meeting of the Board on the 9th Jan. 1814.*

The Committee appointed on the 2d instant made a report that they had communicated the proposed Address to the Board of Overseers of the Poor of the Town, according to the direction of the Trustees, and had received from the Chairman of that Board a copy of a vote passed by the Overseers in the words following, viz.

*At a meeting of the Overseers of the Poor of the town of Boston at the Almshouse, on Wednesday, 5th January, 1814.*

The Trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital, having submitted an address to the Public, on the subject of their proposed Institution, to this Board, for its advice and consideration, thereupon; Voted, That the statements and general reasoning contained in the said address, meet the approbation of this Board, and being deeply impressed with the importance of a General Hospital, within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, they do earnestly recommend the same to the patronage of their fellow citizens.

*Per Order,*

WM. SMITH, *Chairman of the Board of Overseers.*

Whereupon the proposed address to the Public being again read and considered; Voted unanimously, That the same be accepted and signed by each member of the Board, which having been done—Voted, That the Hon. Josiah Quincy, Joseph May, and Richard Sullivan, Esquires, be a Committee to cause the same to be printed and prepared for distribution, with directions to report their proceedings to this Board at the adjournment.

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE  
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE undersigned, having been appointed Trustees of the *Massachusetts General Hospital*, under the provisions established by the Legislature of this Commonwealth, and, in consequence of that appointment, having taken upon themselves that arduous and important trust, find themselves compelled, not less by a sense of duty to the Institution, committed to their care, than by the most imperious obligations of humanity, to appeal, in behalf of both, to the virtue, the pride and sentiment of a generous and highly privileged people. Like the majority of their fellow citizens, the undersigned, antecedent to their appointment, had but faint impressions of the nature and necessity of such an establishment. They had, previously, no conception of the loss occasioned the community and the sufferings inflicted on individuals, by the want of it. They felt not, for they had not been called to reflect sufficiently upon the subject, to realize the shame and almost disgrace resulting from the fact, that the capital of New-England should not possess an Institution, of which, perhaps, no city, the central point of an equal population, either in Europe, or America, is destitute; in a capital too, proverbial for its charity; whose munificent spirit has been felt in the east and in the west; has been seen planting colleges in the wilderness, and scatter-

ing the light of divine truth, in regions beyond distant seas! What then—Is the hand, which has been ever open at the call of others, closed only upon the claims of its own household? Will not that charity, which has gone forth shedding its bounties on foreign lands, come at the call of its country to bless that *home* where, had it been of an ordinary character, it would have first begun; and beyond which, had it been less enlightened, it would have never extended?

It cannot be, that the nature of this subject is understood. It is impossible, that the necessity of such an Institution can be realized, by the people of Massachusetts. Certain we are, that could the number of individuals, which, in consequence of the want of such an establishment, have fallen victims to disease and neglect; could the nature of their sufferings be realized, in all the aggravation of their circumstances, there would be no need of solicitation, or appeal. The charity of our fellow-citizens would anticipate all our desires. Their benefactions would flow in upon us, like water.

The nature of a General Hospital is not understood. Its necessity is not realized. It is thought that private charity is sufficient for all such purposes; or, where this fails, that an Alms-house is ample to supply the deficiency. Alas! how little do those, who thus reason, apprehend the variety of the evils, which beset the condition of man, or the nature of the claims, which poverty and suffering have upon humanity; or the utter insufficiency of an Alms-house to such objects. The cases, which General Hospitals are intended to relieve, are those, to which

private charity cannot, in most instances, effectually reach, if it reach at all ; and to which it is a perversion of the purposes of Alms-houses, when they are made to apply.

We shall instance, in both classes of objects, to which this Institution relates, *the sick poor and the insane*. The poor, in sickness, have, in most cases, great, and in all cases, some claims, in civilized society, on the protection of their fellowmen. "Help or we perish," is an appeal, which no heart that is human, can hear and realize without hastening to relieve. But such is the condition of social life ; and the classes of men are necessarily so far removed from one another, that the cry of distress will often never reach the ear of the able or the willing. Sometimes honest pride, sometimes conscious vice, deters the sufferer. The fear of dependence is the cause why some refrain from divulging their necessities ; delicacy of disposition, of sex, or of situation, is a reason with others. The sphere of every poor man's acquaintance among the affluent, is necessarily limited. Those, who are known to him, are, perhaps, less able than they appear, or less willing than they are able ; or the fund of benevolence has been so often exhausted by pretenders, that even charity itself has grown suspicious and impatient of applications. The sufferer finds repulse, or fears it. He shrinks from denial. He hides himself, and his distress from the world. He sinks under the accumulated weight of poverty and disease. His wants are never known, or if known, it is often when too late for effectual relief. These are no fictions of fancy. In all times, countries, and societies, such cases have existed.



They exist in ours, at this day. In large collections of men, some must be shiftless and some friendless. There must be *strangers*, unknowing and unknown to the society, on which they are accidentally cast. The industrious labourer, the enterprising mechanic, or the hardy yeoman, even in the midst of youth and vigour, is often arrested by disease. To those, with whom he resides, he is unknown, or indifferent; perhaps, burdensome. In his distress, he is ignorant where to apply, and has no one to apply for him. In instances like these, and they are numerous, far beyond our enumeration, or the public apprehension, how can private charity find its object? If found, how, with certainty, can it extend its aid in season to be serviceable?

Besides, were private charity competent, as it is not, to attain a knowledge of all the multiplied forms of disease and wretchedness, which exist in society, it is utterly incapable of extending effectual and adequate relief. It may administer to the comfort of the sufferer. It may assuage his anguish. It may provide funds for his support. In doing this, it has done much. It has done more, than, from individuals, is either expected, or experienced. But how short is this of the aid, which, in critical diseases, is essential! Commodious and retired apartments, skilful, regular, and systematic attendance, well informed nurses, cleanliness, order, care, all so necessary to comfort in sickness, so essential to recovery, are scarcely, if ever, attained by private contribution for the poor, in sickness. Indeed, from the nature of things, such accommodations cannot be attained, for the numbers entitled to relief, any where, except in



the liberal arrangements of an Institution, which, destined for the object and permanent in its plan and foundation, prepares and arranges all the comforts and necessities, which every species of bodily distress, and every form of disease, or suffering can require. Such is the purpose of a General Hospital; such is the necessity of its institution in every advanced and progressive stage of the social state.

But it is thought that Alms-houses can supply all the particulars, in which private charity, from its nature, is deficient. Those, who hold such an opinion, have not well considered the nature of those institutions, nor sufficiently acquainted themselves with the different, and often incompatible, comforts and accommodations those objects require, for which, an Alms-house and a Hospital are respectively provided.

An Alms-house is, in its nature, merely *an asylum for poverty*. Here the poor, without respect of age or sex, have a right to find food and shelter. If it provide medicine and professional attendance, it is because these are inevitably *incidental* to such an establishment, and not because they are the objects of it. *The cure of the sick* is, almost necessarily, a secondary consideration in an Alms-house, and subordinate to its principal design. The very statement of the nature of an Almshouse shows, that it must be incompetent to supply the purposes of a Hospital. An attempt to unite both establishments combines so many objects, as to render it extremely difficult to be completely successful in any. The general arrangements of an Institution, thus comprehensive, must include an Almshouse, a bridewell, a lazaretto, and every species of hospital, foundling,

magdalen and lunatic. The effect of such incongruity of design, may be better imagined than described. Besides, relief of the poor being the principal design of such an institution, poverty becomes an essential requisite for admission to its benefits; to the exclusion of that numerous and interesting class of sufferers, who, without being wholly deprived of funds, are yet, owing to unavoidable circumstances, destitute of those comforts and accommodations, which the particular nature of the disease or accident, which has befallen them, demands. For these, an Almshouse affords no refuge. Yet for such, a Hospital is a peculiar and most desirable asylum.

True it is, that the Almshouse, in Boston, is conducted in a spirit most liberal and sagacious. Whatever can be done to remedy the inconvenience of such comprehensive institutions is effected. Yet the Overseers of that establishment are impressed, not less than the undersigned, with its inadequacy to supply the want of a Hospital. Neither its accommodations, nor its funds, are more than sufficient, if they are equal, to meet the just claims of the aged and infant poor, in such a metropolis as ours. Whatever, therefore, of funds, of room, or of care, is applied *to the mere cure of the sick*, is so much subtracted from the interests of that particular species of charity, for which the Almshouse is provided.

Such is our lamentable deficiency in this Commonwealth, in provision for the poor and the stranger in sickness! But what shall be said in relation to the state of our preparation to relieve the most awful and humiliating misfortune, to which the children of men are subject? What shall be said, when it is

found, that through the whole extent of New-England, even in its capital, there is not one public establishment for the cure of the insane? Even the Alms-house, in this metropolis, does not pretend to cure. With respect to this class, it only claims to afford shelter. How poor! how little does it deserve this humble praise! *All it possesses are accommodations for eight patients!* Yet, scanty as are its provisions, in this respect, and few as are the inducements to partake of its protection, there are often three times as many patients as the house possesses means of accommodating.

In a state of things, thus calculated to excite our sympathy, it is surely unnecessary to add details of inconvenience and expense, to which the opulent are subject, in placing an insane member of a family, in a Hospital, at New-York, or Philadelphia, under the custody of strangers, three, or four hundred miles from their place of residence; or to enumerate the deception and imposition, to which all are liable, when they deliver over these wretched wrecks of intellect to the nostrums of quacks, or to the care, often interested, or unfeeling, of the owners of private mad-houses. If the most innocent and most pitiable of all human afflictions have power to touch the heart,—we have said enough.

It remains only to illustrate the remedy, which the proposed Institution offers for the evils, we have enumerated. The objects, for which Hospitals provide, are those, in whose condition, poverty or friendlessness, or inconvenience of situation, combines with sickness; or those, who are merely insane. The one proposed, contemplates receiving all of this descrip-

tion, from every part of the Commonwealth. The end of the Institution is cure of the disease, whether bodily, or mental, under which they labour. To this, all its arrangements tend. To this, its whole organization is made subservient. It purposes to afford the best medical aid; the best nurses; the most suitable apartments; all the assistance which sickness requires; and all the comforts, which are subsidiary to convalescence. In establishments of this kind, the accommodations provided are often such as strangers, accidentally resident, cannot procure; and are sometimes of a nature, which, even at home, the mediocrity of the middling classes of society cannot command. It will scarcely be said, that purposes such as these, are not worthy of the patronage of an enlightened and liberal community. Will it be said then, that such establishments are incompetent to the objects they propose to effect? The experience of almost every great city, in civilized Europe, and that of New-York and Philadelphia, in our own country, is an evidence of the contrary. Will it be suggested, that they are liable to abuse? We answer, that this is the common condition, to which every thing human is subject. If man shall refuse to do any thing, until he can perform what is perfect; if he will put nothing under the care of others, until he find beings exempt from frailty and error, there is an end to human exertion and of all trust and confidence among men. We ask, what can be entitled to the confidence of the public, if an Institution, formed upon the principles of the one proposed, has not a right to claim it? An Institution, established by the joint charity of individuals and the Legislature of



the Commonwealth ; its conductors responsible to the Executive of the Commonwealth and to the subscribers, by an annual election. What constitution of things can give a higher assurance of integrity and discretion ? How can any general fund of charity be placed under a guard more likely to be faithful and vigilant ?

Although it is naturally to be supposed, that a great portion of the funds, expected on this occasion, will be derived from the subscriptions of inhabitants of the metropolis and from those of the towns in its immediate vicinity, yet the nature of this establishment gives a right to look for liberal contributions from persons, residing at a distance, and in the remote parts of the Commonwealth. It is, in its character, a State establishment. The persons, most likely to stand in need of its benefits, are those, who resort to the metropolis, from remote parts of the Commonwealth, in the capacity of labourers, of mechanics, of sailors, of servants, or teamsters. Such persons are often seized with sickness, in taverns and boarding houses ; and fall victims to the neglect, the ignorance, or the indifference of those, with whom they are occasionally inmates ; and to whom they are generally unknown. This class of persons, and it is numerous, is one of the most peculiar and interesting, for which this asylum is provided. What town, in the Commonwealth, has not some of its inhabitants, every year, exposed to the hazard of accident, or disease, in their occasional intercourse with the metropolis ? How many have perished, in past years, whom such an Institution might have saved to their friends and families ! The

want of such an Institution continuing, it is certain that many, from the same causes, must perish, in future. Cases are familiar to the inhabitants of this metropolis, and are, every year, occurring, in which persons, from the country, either surprised by accident, or by disease, with broken limbs, or labouring under some painful malady, are found, in garrets, or cellars, or in confined rooms, amid filth, and wretchedness, and noise, without comforts of any kind and far from their friends and resources. In such a situation, common charity can give little aid. Is it, then, unreasonable to expect that the liberality and wealth of the country should co-operate with those of the metropolis, in laying the foundations of an Institution, great, general, and expressly destined as an asylum from evils, to which the inhabitants of the country are exposed, in their greatest severity? Let it be remembered, that without the aid of every part of the Commonwealth, it is scarcely possible that this purpose, so desirable and so essential, can be effected; the Legislature of the Commonwealth having, expressly, made it a condition of its grant of the Old Province House, that One hundred thousand dollars shall be raised by the contribution, or donation, of private individuals. Unless, therefore, the wealth and the charity of every part of the State combine, this great fund will be lost to the object. This lost, there is no hope of ultimate success in the undertaking.

It remains only for the undersigned Trustees to explain the principle, upon which they now invite a subscription to the purposes of the Institution. That which they have adopted as the basis of the subscrip-



tion, they propose, is that *no sum subscribed shall be demanded, unless, before the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and fifteen, the sum subscribed by individuals to the Institution, shall amount to, at least, one hundred thousand dollars.*

The ground, on which they have adopted this principle, is to remove all objections, which might occur to generous and enlightened minds, from the apprehension that the funds, they were willing to devote for the establishment of a great and permanent charity, might be diverted to one of mere temporary and occasional character, through the want of co-operation, sufficient to give a foundation to a broad and liberal Institution. The undersigned are also deeply impressed with the belief, that it would be better the proposed Institution should wholly fail, than that it should be commenced upon a cramped and niggardly scale. 'Much of the utility of such an establishment depends upon its *reputation*. If through the deficiency of funds, in its first stages, it cannot afford the comforts, which it presupposes; if it cannot give to the sick the retirement and repose their situation demands; if the virtuous poor, owing to the limited powers of its funds, cannot be separated from the vicious, and the facilities at once yielded, which may encourage modesty, character, and misfortune, to avail themselves of its bounties, it will soon sink in their estimation and in that of the public. In such event, the real benefits of the Institution cannot be realized. And it is obvious, that the general interests of charity must suffer from defects really resulting from the inadequacy of the funds, but which will be

apt to be attributed to the supposed inadequacy of such establishments to their purposes.

Besides, the undersigned are willing to confess, that they are not ambitious of being the guardians of a charity *merely nominal*; they are satisfied that the sum, affixed by the Legislature as the condition of its grant, is so small, when compared with the wealth of individuals and the greatness of the State, that no plea, arising from "the hardship of the times," "the general embarrassment of affairs," or "the claims of other charities," can, or ought, avail the community. If such a proposal as this fail, it will be, in the judgment of the undersigned, decisive of the fate of the establishment. It will then be apparent, that *the will is wanting* in the public, to patronize such an undertaking; and that the honor of laying the foundation of a fabric of charity, so noble and majestic, must be left for times, when a higher cast of character predominates, and to a more enlightened and sympathetic race of men.

*Boston, 8th January, 1814.*

T. H. PERKINS,  
JOSIAH QUINCY,  
DANIEL SARGENT,  
S. HIGGINSON, JUN.  
JOHN L. SULLIVAN,  
RICHARD SULLIVAN,

TRISTRAM BARNARD,  
GEORGE G. LEE,  
FRANCIS C. LOWELL,  
JOSEPH MAY,  
JOSEPH TILDEN,  
GAMALIEL BRADFORD.







